

T/TAC Link Lines

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The IST Problem Solving Approach

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The success of Virginia's Instructional Support Team (IST) initiative described in the August-September, 2001 Link Lines newsletter is predicated upon each team member employing a systematic process of problem solving. Problems are viewed as the result

of an inadequate match between what the student knows and needs, the task to be learned, and the instructional management strategies (Rosenfield & Gravois, 1996).

In order to create an instructional match, the IST problem-solving process attempts to answer five basic questions.

1. What does the student know?
2. What can the student do?
3. How does the student think?
4. How does the student approach what he/she is unsure of?
5. As a teacher, what do I do now?

The IST problem-solving process consists of five stages: contracting, problem identification and analysis, Intervention design, implementation and evaluation and follow-up/redesign/closure. The following case study describes these five stages:

1. Contracting: A third-grade teacher, Ms. Peppy (P.), requests assistance from the IST teacher with a student, Cheri, who is experiencing both behavioral and academic difficulties. The contracting session provides Ms. P with an overview of the instructional problem-solving process. The IST teacher advises Ms. P that this process requires a commitment to work for a period of time (3-6 weeks) and confirms Ms. P's willingness to participate.

2. Problem Identification and Analysis: In the process of clarifying her description of Cheri knows and can do, Ms. P. reports that Cheri correctly

Completes her work in math and is less disruptive during that period. However, when Cheri is unsure of her answers, she immediately calls for the teacher's help, gets out of her seat, and talks to other students. This typically occurs during reading and language arts. The teacher also relates that Cheri was in a Title I reading program in first grade. Based on this information, Ms. P. and the IST teacher begin to establish that Cheri's behavior problems are most likely to occur during reading and language arts. They hypothesize that Cheri may be dealing with reading materials more challenging than she can handle during those. This typically occurs during reading and language arts.

In order to develop a clearer picture of the exact nature of Cheri's problems, the IST teacher suggests a curriculum-based assessment (CBA) that examines Cheri's reading skills in her current instructional materials. The assessment component may also include an error analysis; task analysis; classroom observation; functional behavioral assessment (FBA); interviews with teachers, students, and parents; and/or an instructional environmental analysis. The assessment is completed through a collaborative effort between the IST teacher and the classroom teacher.

The IST teacher conducts a CBA in reading with Cheri with Ms. P. observing the process. In addition, Ms. P. collects writing samples based on class reading assignments, arranges a classroom observation by the IST teacher, and schedules a meeting with the Title I teacher.

The problem identification and analysis stage always involves collecting data to further refine the description of the problem(s) in observable, measurable terms.

The CBA revealed that although Cheri could decode words accurately and had grade-level listening skills, her fluency rate was similar to that of a first-grade student (30-70 words per minute). Her

problem with fluency appeared to interfere with her comprehension. Cheri was unable to retell a story orally even with guided questions. As might be expected, her writing samples were vague and disjointed. The classroom observation confirmed her out-of-seat behavior and her tendency to talk, both of which occur more frequently during the reading and language arts lessons. The Title I teacher reported that Cheri could decode words and apply phonetic skills, albeit rather laboriously.

3. Intervention Design: After a clear, identifiable problem is defined, that is, a gap between current and desired performance, the IST teacher and the classroom teacher integrate the data collected with best practices and current research to design appropriate interventions. If other students might benefit from the same intervention(s), group or whole-class interventions are designed.

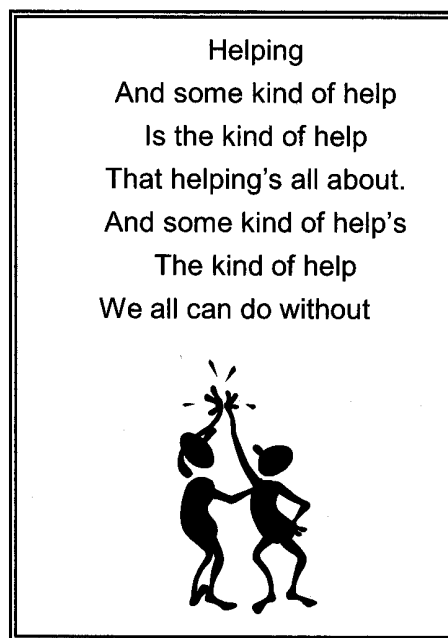
In Cheri's case, fluency strategies were developed to increase her rate of reading and to enhance comprehension in her present reading level. Mrs. P and the IST teacher used trial teaching to determine the efficacy of the strategy(ies).

4. Implementation and Evaluation of Intervention: The IST teacher supports the classroom teacher in ensuring that all aspects of the intervention are put in place. Depending on the needs of the target student and other students in the class, the IST teacher may model instructional strategies or the classroom teacher and IST teacher may co-teach a whole-class lesson using the interventions. These teachers collaboratively decide what the interventions will look like, who will implement them, and the frequency with which they will be used.

Evaluation methods are selected in order to track the student's progress. The IST teacher

assists the classroom teacher in establishing a baseline, as well as charting and analyzing data over the period of the intervention. With the help of the IST teacher, Ms.P. tracked words per minute (wpm) read on new material and subsequent rereadings in order to assess Cheri's progress. In addition, the numbers of correct responses to comprehension questions were also charted.

5. Follow-up/Redesign/Closure: The IST teacher and classroom teacher review the progress toward the established goals. If adequate progress is made and the teacher is comfortable in continuing to implement the strategies, the case is closed until the teacher has another concern. If progress is not made, the process may loop back to intervention design or even problem identification.



References

Rosenfield, S., & Gravois, T. (1996). *Instructional consultation teams*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Silverstein, S. (1974). *Where the sidewalk ends*. New York: Harper & Row.